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AUTHOR Lyman, Lawrence; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Recognizing that strong educational leadership is the pivotal point in successful school improvement programs, the Kansas school districts of Arkansas City, Winfield, and El Dorado joined together during the 1988-89 school year to establish the AWE Leadership Academy. The purpose of the academy is to provide a program of continued professional growth opportunities for the administrative staffs of the three school districts. As planned, the academy will involve a 3-year cycle. Each of the first 2 years of the academy will include an intensive summer training session in August followed by monthly sessions focusing on various aspects of administration and school improvement. The academy is taught and coordinated by a faculty member from Emporia State University. In addition, nationally recognized experts in the area of school improvement are invited to address the academy. A planning committee, made up of representatives from each of the participating school districts, meets regularly to evaluate the pace, content, and direction of the academy. Administrators participating in the academy sessions can elect to receive graduate credit for work-related study. Networking between administrators in the academy has given those with similar job assignments opportunities to work together on problem solving, to share ideas they have tried in their schools, and to discuss mutual concerns. (MLF)

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Preparing Administrators for Future Challenges: *The AWE Leadership Academy*

Lawrence Lyman, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
Emporia State University

William Medley
Superintendent

Chuck Wright
Board President

Winfield Unified School District
Winfield, Kansas

Leonard Steinle, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Wilma Ledeker
Board Member

Arkansas City Unified School District
Arkansas City, Kansas

Wynona Winn, Ph.D.
Superintendent

Larry McCully
Board President

El Dorado Unified School District
El Dorado, Kansas

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National School Boards Association Convention
Anaheim, California
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For additional information, contact
Lawrence Lyman
The Teachers College
Emporia State University
1200 Commercial Street
Emporia, KS 66801-5087
(316) 343-5775

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Introduction

Recognizing that strong educational leadership is the pivotal point in successful school improvement programs, the Kansas school districts of Arkansas City, Winfield, and El Dorado joined together during the 1988–89 school year to establish the AWE Leadership Academy. The purpose of the Academy is to provide a program of continued professional growth opportunities for the administrative staffs of the three school districts. The explicit mission of the AWE Academy is to facilitate the development of the educational leadership skills of each of the participants to the utmost so that he or she will have the greatest possible impact in bringing about school improvement efforts which indeed result in all children learning.

Rationale for the Academy

Quite possibly, the 1980's will become known in the historical chronicles of education as the decade of the reform reports. Many groups and individuals, including the President of the United States, have commissioned studies to determine the condition of schooling in the United States. While differences exist among the content, thrusts, and findings of these studies, one strong commonality can be identified. The literature is replete with evidence that central to any school improvement is the quality of administrative leadership exhibited at every level within the school's organization. Admittedly, school improvement is multifaceted, but those schools that are identified as effective according to research criteria are administered by highly competent, skillful men and women. Thus, it would seem those school districts which are indeed committed to school improvement would have a continuous program of staff development for administrators focusing on educational leadership.

One approach which can be used to implement a program of administrative development is the formation of a defined, outcome-based leadership academy. The concept of a leadership academy is not new. One of the oldest and most successful was established at Harvard University. The Harvard Academy was an institutional response to the growing awareness of a need for

continued professional development of public school administrators and the fact that single school districts could not finance comprehensive administrator staff development programs. Through collaborative efforts with multiple districts, however, such a venture could be funded. The AWE Leadership Academy has similar characteristics. It is being implemented with the assistance of a university well known for excellence in preparing administrators. The AWE Academy, which focuses on the continuing education of administrators is funded through the combined fiscal resources of the three independent school districts which are designated by the letters *A W E:* Arkansas City, Winfield, and El Dorado.

Structure of the Academy

As planned, the Academy will involve a three-year cycle. Years One and Two will include training in specific areas. Year Three will focus on implementation and evaluation of the school improvement efforts in each of the three school districts. Each of the first two years of the Academy will include an intensive summer training session in August followed by monthly sessions focusing on various aspects of administration and school improvement. The Academy is taught and coordinated by a faculty member from Emporia State University.

In addition, nationally recognized experts in the area of school improvement are invited to address the Academy. During the first year of the Academy, invited speakers were Dr. Lawrence Lezotte; Dr. Larry Zenke, Superintendent of the Tulsa, Oklahoma, Public Schools; and Dr. Donald Thomas. All three consultants are nationally recognized as experts in the field of school improvement.

The monthly sessions which bring all Academy participants together are supplemented by individual consultation by Dr. Larry Lyman of Emporia State University. During the first year of the Academy, each district staff determined how Dr. Lyman's follow-up day in their district was to be used. Projects undertaken in individual districts included: awareness sessions for teachers about the Academy and school improvement; sessions for custodians and secretaries defining their role in

effective schools; instruction in group processes, staff development models, and effective instructional techniques; and meetings with building improvement teams. Dr. Lyman also provided individual feedback and coaching to district administrators and assisted in goal setting as requested.

Table 1

AWE Academy Topics

Year One (1988–89)

August	Effective Schools Research
September	Leadership
October	Effective Schools Practices (Dr. Lezotte)
November	Shared Decision Making (Dr. Zenke)
December	Culture and Climate of Effective Schools
January	Expectations for Students, Staff, Community
February	Expectations (continued)
March	Assessment and Measurement (Dr. Thomas)
April	Communication
May	Planning for Year Two

Year Two (Tentative Schedule)

August	Effective Teaching and Supervision
September	Models of Teaching
October	Models of Teaching
November	Models of Teaching
December	Supervision
January	Supervision
February	Building Level Improvement Planning
March	Conflict Management
April	Academic Engaged Time
May	Strategies of Implementation

Year Three (Tentative Schedule)

Implementation and Evaluation

Summer session activities are held on the Emporia State University campus. During the school year, training sessions rotate among the participating school districts.

Participation in the Academy

The AWE Leadership Academy serves practicing administrators who are already actively involved in school leadership in their respective school districts. A wide range of experience, ranging from first-year administrators to career administrators within several years of retirement, is represented by the administrators who participated in the Academy during the 1988–89 school year. One of the challenges of the Academy effort is to design learning experiences which meet the needs of so varied an audience. Therefore, a planning committee, made up of representatives from each of the participating school districts meets regularly to evaluate the pace, content, and direction of the Academy.

During the 1988–89 school year, administrators participating in the Academy sessions could elect to receive six graduate hours of credit from Emporia State University for their work during the Academy. The opportunity to earn graduate credit for work-related study has been helpful to administrators participating in advanced studies at Emporia State University and at other Kansas universities.

Table 2

Participation in the AWE Academy, 1988–89

Districts	*Student Enrollment*	*Central Office Participants*	*Secondary Participants*	*Elementary Participants*	*Superintendents/ Board Presidents*
Arkansas City 119 W. Washington Arkansas City, KS 67005	3,115	2	6	4	Dr. Leonard Steinle Dr. Nick Rogers
Winfield 920 Millington Winfield, KS 67156	2,310	3	3	4	William Medley Chuck Wright
El Dorado 1518 West Sixth El Dorado, KS 67042	2,065	4	5	5	Dr. Wynona Winn Larry McCully

Advantages of the Academy

The AWE Leadership Academy has provided an opportunity for three school districts of similar size and characteristics to extend their previous cooperative efforts in shared teacher inservice to the area of shared administrative inservice. The Academy has provided opportunities for Board of Education members from the three districts to meet together and share ideas. For example, during the fall of 1988, the Boards met together to hear an address by Dr. Lezotte on the role of the Board in effective schools.

Networking between administrators in the Academy has been a positive aspect of the Academy experience. Administrators with similar job assignments have been given opportunities to work together on problem solving, to share ideas they have tried in their schools, and to discuss mutual concerns. Because administrators have also worked with administrators who have different job assignments during the Academy, an appreciation of the talents and concerns of other administrators has been encouraged.

The teaching methodology of the Academy has focused on active participation by administrators in discussing ideas related to effective schools, analyzing their own schools to determine areas of strength and weakness, setting goals for improvement, and hearing and expressing differing viewpoints on issues raised during the Academy. As administrators have worked together, group processes and skills have been enhanced.

Coaching and feedback have been available to participants throughout the Academy. Sharing with other administrators has provided opportunities to compare strategies, analyze problems, and share successes. Superintendents Steinle, Medley, and Winn, who have been active participants in the Academy, are available to provide assistance as needed. The Academy also provides for individual coaching and feedback from Dr. Lyman during his monthly visit to each school district.

During a report to his Board of Education about the Academy, one participant summed up his experiences with the Academy this way: "From the AWE Academy and from Dr. Lyman, I have

gotten a whole new perspective on school administration; I now know what an empowered leader is and I feel I am becoming one."

Logistical Considerations

The creation of the AWE Leadership Academy has been, and continues to be, a learning experience for those involved with it. Problems of time, agenda, and cost have been involved in the Academy during its first year.

The primary drawback to the Academy for most of the administrators has been time away from their respective assignments. Particularly for principals, additional meetings during the school year have been difficult when added to an already full administrative schedule. Academy sessions have usually been scheduled from 1:30 to 7:30 which adds another evening meeting to the participants' schedules and takes principals out of their buildings for an additional afternoon each month.

The agenda of the Academy was cooperatively determined by the three school districts. Because the Academy has sought to provide a comprehensive overview of the process of school improvement, however, some duplication of the participants' previous experiences was inevitable. Administrators have also expressed concern about the extent to which small group activities, a primary teaching strategy of the academy, have been used. The planning committee, mentioned earlier, has helped to provide a forum where the issues to be discussed in the Academy could be reviewed and revised as needed.

Cost of district participation in the Academy has required commitment on the part of Superintendents and Board members. Costs of the Leadership Academy have included: guest speakers' consultant fees and expenses, fees and expenses for district follow-up sessions with the university consultant, materials, travel to meetings in other districts, meals, and facility expenses. District cost for participation in the Academy during the 1988–89 school year has been estimated at $10,000 to $12,000 per school district.

The Superintendents who had the idea to originate the Leadership Academy had a vision of

their administrators becoming more effective and continuing to grow professionally. The implementation of any vision brings with it problems and concerns. The mutual cooperation and commitment of the Boards of Education and the Superintendents participating in the AWE Academy have insured that the Academy will go forward into its second year.

Conclusion

The AWE Leadership Academy was created to enhance the skills of practicing administrators in three Kansas school districts. The three districts share the vision that schools can become places where all students can learn. If that vision is to become a reality, the continuing training and professional growth of the administrators who lead those schools is of major importance. The AWE Leadership Academy is a collaborative effort between school districts dedicated to empowering administrators to meet the challenges they will face in the 1990's and beyond.